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ABSTRACT

The political system of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) is explained and comparisons are made with the U.S. system. Descriptions are given of the West German political parties and the process and importance of forming coalitions is explained. A lesson plan is presented that utilizes the case study and includes a simulation exercise that presumes the United States becomes a multi-party system and gives students the chance to form coalitions in the government. A study guide and three charts conclude the document. (JB)

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A Comparison of the Two-Party and Multi-Party Political Systems

A Case Study Using the United States and West Germany

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A COMPARISON OF THE TWO-PARTY AND MULTI-PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEMS
A CASE STUDY USING THE UNITED STATES AND WEST GERMANY

BY: JAMES GARLAND
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The Wednesday following the presidential election in the United States, the public knows who will be the next President of the United States. Under our two-party system and the electoral college, a winner emerges from the election. The public also knows which party will control each house of Congress. In The Federal Republic of Germany, (West Germany) the system is far different. The country operates under a multi-party system and coalitions are necessary to form a government. The purpose of this case study will be to explain the German political system, compare it to the one in the United States and to present a simulation exercise which presumes the United States becomes a multi-party system, and gives students the chance to form coalitions in our government.

GOVERNMENT IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949. This document is the equivalent of the U.S. Constitution. The main goal of the Basic Law is to provide West Germany with a democratic form of government which would be strong enough to resist the weaknesses that led to the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler. In the West German system the Bundestag is the supreme democratic organ. It plays a key role in the structure of the state and in forming the political will. Perhaps the most important role of the Bundestag for this case study is its right to elect the head of government, The Federal Chancellor. To be elected to this post a person must receive the votes of a a majority of the members of the Bundestag. The Chancellor becomes the head of the government in a position similar to the U.S. President.

Currently there is a multi-party system in The Federal Republic represented in the Bundestag. There are four parties represented: The Christian Democratic Union and its sister party The Christian Social Union (CDU/CSUs), The Social Democratic Party (SPDs), The Free Democratic Party (FDPs) and the Greens. German law requires a party to receive at least five percent of the vote to be represented in the Bundestag. This five percent barrier is critical to the success of the system as it prevents numerous minor parties from being represented and making stable coalitions impossible. The political parties in the Federal Republic assume various vital functions in the political process. First of all, they play a key role in the elections by selecting and nominating

candidates for political office. There are 496 elected voting members in the Bundestag. Half the members are elected directly in a district. The other half enters the Bundestag by being elected from a state-wide party list in proportion to the votes their respective parties have gained in the election. Voters vote on a ballot on which they make a selection from two separate lists. (See attached example of a ballot) Each party receiving more than the required five percent will have seats equalling the percentage of votes received. This means that once the number of seats won by a party has been established, the first to be considered are those candidates who have been elected directly by their districts. The remaining seats are then distributed from the party lists, which set forth the names of the candidates in the order determined by the parties.
NOTE: This is a difficult concept for Americans to grasp. To simplify the process assume a Bundestag with 100 seats. The CDU/CSUs win 48% of the votes on the second ballot and thus are entitled to 48 seats. They win 25 districts. The first 23 names on their party list are then elected to the 23 remaining seats. The Greens win 9% of the vote. They fail to win a single district. The first nine names on their party list are then elected .

The current make up of the Bundestag can be seen on the attached graph. In this situation no party has more than 50% and thus no one party can choose the Chancellor. In this case a coalition government must be formed. Today the ruling coalition consists of the CDU/CSUs and the FDPs.

At the present time, the Federal Republic truly has a two-party bloc system. On one side are the CDU/CSUs and the FDPs, which formed a governing coalition with only a four year interruption from 1949 to 1966, and have done so again from 1982 under the leadership of CDU Chancellor Helmut Kohl. On the left there are the Social Democrats and the Greens who do not know whether they should form a coalition or not. The fact is that neither of the two major parties seems strong enough to win the necessary majority to enable it to form a government on its own. For a shift to the left to occur after the next election, it seems that the Greens will have to attract additional strength and along with the SPDs be able to form an effective coalition. There is one additional factor in looking at the future. There is a new party, the Republicans, who have emerged on the far right of the political spectrum. If this party would receive more than 5% of the seats in the Bundestag, the question would be whether any party would be willing to include them in a coalition. The impact of such an electoral showing by the Republicans is one which is being closely watched and studied.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Descriptions from Dr.Peter E.Weilemann, the deputy director of the Research Institute of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Bonn.

CDU/CSU The Christian Democratic Union is joined with its sister party The Christian Social Union. "It was the CDU/CSU party that laid the foundations for the integration of the Federal Republic with the West, pushing for a stronger Atlantic Alliance, European integration and reconciliation (The party) favors a strong state to protect the rights and liberties of the individual, to care for the disadvantaged when other social groups cannot, but do not want to interfere with social and economic developments. Freedom must be defended...Normal relations with the East should be reached through a policy of dialogue and strength."

SPD "The SPD was founded in the 1860s as a party of the working class with some Marxist orientation, it was banned during the Third Reich. The SPD is proud of its roots in the workers movement and did not formally give up its Marxist doctrine until 1959...It reluctantly agreed to Western integration, especially on the military level, mainly for national reasons...By 1960, however, it had accepted the changed situation...(The party) favors a strong role of the government in the economic process and especially in structuring society along more egalitarian principles, The SPD set in motion a policy which extended the network of social security, strove for more equal opportunities in education, and set out to 'dare more democracy' not only in the political process but also in the economy (particularly in labor-management relations) and other areas of social life."

FDP "The FDP wants to be a major player in German politics but seems destined to be the liberal corrective to the two big parties. Today they present themselves in a somewhat more conservative manner than before, criticizing the 'social market' economy from a liberal point of view. They speak out as protectors of individual rights against encroachments by the state and for the legal rights of minorities. They demand equal opportunities for all, with a little help from the state, but emphasize the achievement of the individual... they regard themselves as the true banner holders of a policy of relaxation with the East and supporters of closer European integration."
NOTE: It is important to make clear the meaning of liberal in West Germany differs a great deal from that we use in the United States. The FDP liberal is very similar to the liberal wing of the United States Republican Party and thus is rather conservative.

THE GREENS _"The Greens are the first truly radical party which has managed to enter the Bundestag since 1953, and are likely to stay there. They portray themselves as an ecological and peace movement. They are for better protection of the environment and basically against nuclear energy, even at the price of high economic costs. They favor a neutral, disarmed Federal Republic of Germany, disregarding the political risks. The philosophical and theoretical program of the Greens is still intensely debated within the party itself: the **Fundamentalists** seem to be very reluctant to assume political responsibility in a government. The **Realists**...want to change the system by playing its rules, and are ready to enter coalitions."

THE FORMATION OF COALITIONS

The basic goal of political parties in the West German system is to achieve a majority of the Bundestag and be able to control the government. The main objective of the parties that are being courted to make the coalitions is to maximize their chances of being re-elected. This is mainly accomplished by obtaining ministries that are visible to the public. Coalitions are formed by intense negotiations between the parties in the following areas: 1. policy 2. ministries 3. who will fill the jobs.

Since the formation of the Federal Republic, the party that seems to be in the drivers seat is the FDP. It has been part of almost every coalition that has been formed. The following brief review will illustrate the process of coalition making. The job of Foreign Minister is the prize that small parties crave. This is due to the great visibility that this position provides. The opportunity for national exposure is excellent and the job is usually the price for joining the coalition. From 1969 to 1974 the governing coalition consisted of the SPDs and the FDPs. Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the FDPs held the position of Minister of Interior. When the FDP Minister of Foreign Affairs, Walter Scheel, was made the Federal President in 1974, Gentscher, the FDP party chairman, demanded the job of Foreign Minister as the price to maintain the coalition. He was given the post even though there were doubts of his ability. In 1982, the FDPs switched sides and joined the CDU/CSUs to form the government under Chancellor Kohl. Gentscher demanded and was retained in his position as Foreign Minister which he still holds today. The reason for the shift was the growing unpopularity of the SPDs. The FDPs felt that they had to change in order to be able to keep their five percent and stay in government. Other posts held by the FDPs are Minister of Economics and Minister of Justice. The first of these is because of visibility and the second due to the party's philosophy.

A more recent example of the power of the FDPs in maintaining the governing coalition can be seen in the controversy over the Polish borders in the early spring of 1990. Chancellor Kohl was unwilling to pledge to maintain the borders with Poland. It was Kohl's coalition partner, FDP Foreign Minister Gentscher, who warned that his party would leave the coalition and bring down the government if Kohl did not back down. Kohl backed down.

After the December 1990 elections are held the process of negotiations will begin again. It seems likely at this time that the present coalition will remain in power. In order for the SPDs to retain power they must be able to entice the FDPs from their present position. This seems unlikely. Even more unlikely would be the SPDs and the Greens

having the power to form a coalition. The most unlikely possibility would be a three party coalition between the SPDs, FDPs, and the Greens. They have too many differences to ever be able to work together.

The March 1990 elections in East Germany produced a victory for the conservative coalition backed by Chancellor Kohl and his CDU/CSU party. Events in Eastern Europe are in such a transitional state that any positive prediction as to the effects of this election is impossible. However, it seems that these results might speed up the process of unification. The political effects seem to be to strengthen the current West German governing coalition. The scenario described in the above paragraph appears to be unchanged.

COMPARISON OF THE UNITED STATES AND WEST GERMANY GOVERNMENTS

In analyzing the differences between the governments of the two countries, the first thing that seems to be true is that the government of the United States is more efficient than that in West Germany. As stated at the beginning of this case study, on election day the public knows who will be in government. The electoral college's "winner take all" method assures that one candidate will almost always win a majority of the electoral votes. In Congress, single member districts which only require a plurality of the votes to win, assure that one party will be in the majority in each house. Third parties seldom have a chance to win a single district and thus have no representation in Congress. This makes the majority party responsible for the operation of each house.

In West Germany, on the other hand, more views are represented in the Bundestag. Any party with the minimum of five percent of the vote is represented. With more than two parties in government, the voice of the smaller parties is heard. In some instances these small parties are the ones who can make or break a government coalition, thus giving them power in a far greater proportion than the votes they received. It is probably accurate to say that the West German system encourages diversity in politics while the United States encourages its parties to move constantly towards the middle of the road.

LESSON PLAN

This lesson has three basic objectives:

1. Students will study how the multi-party system of government works in the Federal Republic of Germany.

2. Students will compare the West German system to the two-party system in the United States.

3. By use of a simulation, students will explore how the United States would operate using the West German model.

PROCEDURE

1. Teachers should pass out copies of the case study contained on page 1 through 6. Students should be given time to read the lesson.

2. Teacher should go over the case study with students making sure that they understand the basics of the West German system (If time is a limiting factor, the descriptions of the parties on pages 3 & 4 may be left out and the teacher can give brief overview of each party).

3. Students will then participate in the simulation using the following suggested format:

    A. Tell students that you have magically converted the United States into a political system that resembles that used in West Germany. In this system The House of Representatives plays the key role in the formation of government. After elections the House will choose the President of the United States. To elect a President a majority of votes in the House is necessary.

    B. A political party needs a minimum of 5% to be represented in the House. A system is used that guarantees any party with 5% or more of the vote representation even if they do not win any districts. Because of this there has been a realignment of the political parties. In addition to the Republicans and the Democrats, Jesse Jackson has formed the Rainbow Party, The ultra-conservative wing of the Republican party has formed the 700 party under the leadership of Pat Robertson and Jesse Helms. Moderate Democrats and

liberal Republicans have formed the Progressive party which is led by Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar. Each of these parties have met the requirement of at least 5% of the vote. (Teachers may substitute any other leaders they wish)

C. Divide the students into five groups representing each of the five parties. The parties are to meet to negotiate the formation of a government and the election of a President. The make up of the House is contained on the attached graph.

4. Students are given a specific amount of time to form a coalition government. They have the following items to use in negotiations.

   A. Agreement to specific legislative proposals that will be supported by a majority of the House and the President. This legislation should include the areas of social legislation, defense and foreign affairs.

   B. Distribution of the President's Cabinet posts.

   C. Parties are to act as a united group they may not split votes.

NOTE: For this step teachers can either have prepared the students before with the goals of each party or students can do research to find legislative goals. The lesson should come after the Cabinet and its role has been discussed.

5. Students announce the Government of the United States and what was promised to form the government. This should include the agreed upon legislation and the members of the President's Cabinet.

The suggested time allowed for this case study and simulation is three to four class periods. By combining research projects into the exercise the time may be expanded.

STUDY GUIDE

The following questions should be used along with the lesson.

1. What part of the United States government corresponds with the following: A) The Bundestag B) The Chancellor

2. What is the role of the Bundestag in the formation of the West German government?

3. What is the five percent barrier? What vital role does it play in the formation of the West German government?

4. Explain the procedure for filling the elected seats in the Bundestag.

5. What is the ruling coalition in West Germany today? How did this coalition develop?

6. Place the West German political parties on the following political spectrum.

Left Center Right
/_____/_____/_____

7. What are the main objectives of a political party when seeking a coalition?

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Write an essay explaining the major differences between the United States two-party system and the West German multi-party system. Point out he strengths and weaknesses of each system.

Stimmzettel

für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag im Wahlkreis 63 Bonn am 25. Januar 1987

Sie haben 2 Stimmen

hier 1 Stimme
für die Wahl
eines Wahlkreisabgeordneten
Erststimme

1	Dr. Daniels, Hans	CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
2	Prof. Dr. Ehmke, Horst	SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
3	Restrop, Friedhelm	F.D.P.	Freie Demokratische Partei
4	Bilten-Girmscheid, Gerhard	GRÜNE	DIE GRÜNEN
11	Müchler, [illegible]	Patrioten	Patrioten für Deutschland
12	Hansen, [illegible]		FRIEDEN

hier 1 Stimme
für die Wahl
einer Landesliste (Partei)
— maßgebende Stimme für die Verteilung der Sitze insgesamt auf die einzelnen Parteien —
Zweitstimme

CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	1
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	2
F.D.P.	Freie Demokratische Partei	3
GRÜNE	DIE GRÜNEN	4
ZENTRUM	Deutsche Zentrumspartei	5
Mündige Bürger	Die Mündigen Bürger	6
FRAUEN	FRAUENPARTEI	7
MLPD	Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands	8
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	9
ÖDP	Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei	10
Patrioten	Patrioten für Deutschland	11

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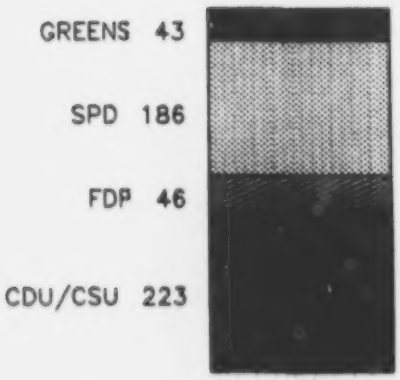

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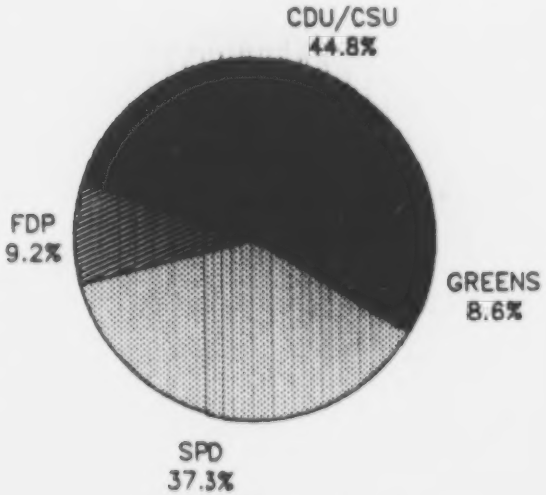
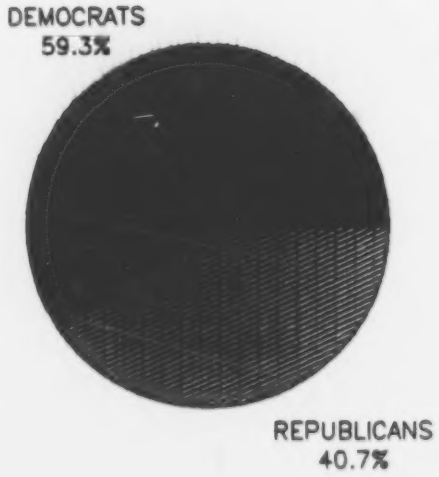
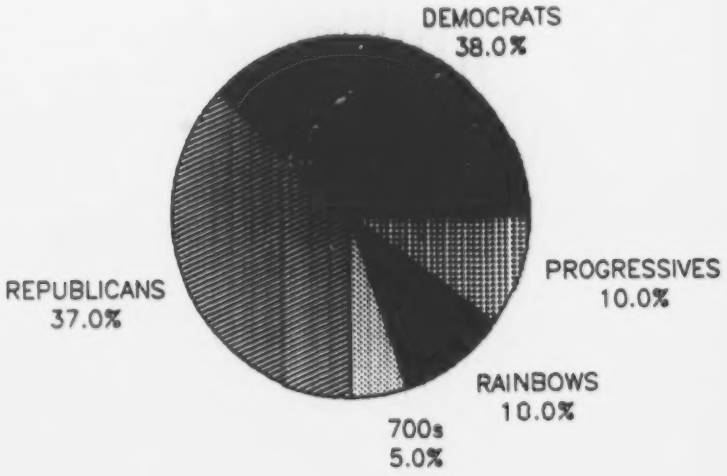


PERCENTAGE

U.S. AS MULTI–PARTY SYSTEM



U.S. TODAY



HYPOTHETICAL U.S.